**Showcasing the DNR: Fish production facility improvements begin across Michigan**

*Thirty million dollars to finance three summers of projects at six hatcheries*

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With a 2023 state general fund budget appropriation of $30 million, six Michigan Department of Natural Resources fish hatcheries are being improved by updating outdated and aging infrastructure.

Several of the sites have only seen limited updates or upgrades since the late 1970s –facilities and equipment pushing 50 years old. I think about my own body at 50 and often wonder when my body parts are going to fail.

In terms of our critical hatcheries, managers don’t want to be left wondering whether today might be the day that something vital to operations gives out.

Unfortunately, this happened recently, which reduces our ability to fulfill our mission to protect and enhance Michigan’s fisheries.

In the spring and summer of 2021, the Wolf Lake State Fish Hatchery experienced three major power failures. The primary electrical infrastructure failed at three separate points during that time.

Also, the primary electrical distribution system was failing. This was a real wake-up call for the Fisheries Division and the DNR.

Planning had already been underway for a substantial funding request to address the needs for capital improvements at our hatcheries. These failures highlighted the critical need to invest in Michigan’s hatchery infrastructure.

Then the pandemic hit, and we had to postpone some operations, including egg collections for steelhead that year. Had we taken steelhead eggs in 2020, we later realized that it likely would have resulted in most, if not all, of the eggs being lost with the infrastructure failures – a blessing in disguise from the coronavirus pandemic.

When I was asked to tell the story about the capital outlay projects, I thought that it may not be of interest because we haven’t really broken ground on most projects, and construction projects are not that flashy to talk about.

But when I began thinking about what we have accomplished in the last 18 months, it is apparent that the scale of the projects at our six hatcheries is huge and likely the most substantial investment in our hatcheries for decades.

For starters, we began by building internal teams to develop a plan to tackle the array of projects we had on the board and crafting a vision of where our greatest needs occurred.

Our next step was to get a design firm on board. After that, we shared our vision with the designers and strategized how we would accomplish this mission over the next four years.

Getting the design firm and the initial planning done, which put us six months down the road, led us to an understanding.

We realized that we may not have enough funding to do everything that our hatcheries needed given changes in the economy, including inflation and supply chain concerns, as well as the decade-long backlog in major maintenance and repair projects.

To address this, we initiated a process of prioritization, which allowed us to be prepared to make difficult decisions and adapt through the construction process.

The sheer number of projects spread across the hatchery facilities was daunting.

So, we teamed up with Hobbs + Black Architects of Lansing, who have brought on many top-notch design firms, including McMillen Inc. of Boise, Idaho, which is one of the nation’s best aquaculture design and construction firms.

Construction will be managed by Spence Brothers Construction of Traverse City for the northern three facilities and Christman Constructors of Lansing for the southern three facilities.

Part of our strategy going forward was to separate projects into north and south regions, like the way our hatcheries are organized and managed. Also, a common theme among the projects is improving energy efficiency.

Technology has improved tremendously since the hatcheries were originally built, and reducing energy usage across the board will save on utility expenditures as well as cut the overall carbon footprint of our operations.

We have been meeting with designers and engineers every two weeks for the past year, a year that began by discussing projects on a large scale. As an implementation strategy developed, we shifted focus to first-year projects.

Those projects are now nearing final design stages, and construction contracts will likely be executed this coming summer. Meetings and strategizing will continue as construction begins and the details of the projects for the coming three years are finalized.

The myriad components of this large capital outlay work fall largely under three general categories, including deferred infrastructure needs, energy-efficiency improvements and biosecurity improvements.

Here is a closer look at what exactly will be happening over the next three summers.

**Marquette State Fish Hatchery** in Marquette County houses brood stock for our brook trout, lake trout and Arctic grayling programs. It is also a production facility that stocks brook trout, lake trout and splake in Michigan waters.

The Marquette hatchery is slated to get a new roof on the hatchery building and a new energy-efficient boiler, as well as updated heating, ventilation and air conditioning controls in 2024. A new brood-isolation building will be built to replace the current crumbling structure. Leveling of settling concrete around the facility to improve accessibility will cap off the 2025 projects. Finally, in 2026, the facility will be completely repaved.

The facility is expected to receive $3.5 million for its improvements.

**Thompson State Fish Hatchery** in Schoolcraft County produces steelhead and Chinook salmon for stocking in Michigan waters. Thompson is also home to a state-of-the-art cool-water facility that supports walleye and muskellunge rearing programs.

In 2017, the Thompson hatchery was expanded to include a cool-water facility and pond rearing complex as part of a capital outlay package. An updated automated fish-feeding system was also installed in the outdoor steelhead rearing complex at this time. The 2023 capital outlay package included many needed upgrades to the cold-water facility.

Thompson is slated to have a new truck storage building built in 2024 at the cool-water facility to house fish-stocking vehicles and various fish-rearing equipment used at the new facility. Resurfacing concrete in the production raceways and indoor rearing units should vastly improve fish quality and health in 2025.

Additionally, improving hatchery insulation and dehumidification as part of updating HVAC systems will improve energy-efficiency efforts. Finally in 2026, the cold-water facility will be completely repaved, and the cool-water facility will be partially paved.

The Thompson hatchery will also be provided $3.5 million for the upgrades.

**Oden State Fish Hatchery** in Emmet County houses brood stock for brown and rainbow trout programs. It is also a production facility for that stocks brown and rainbow trout in Michigan waters.

A couple of ongoing projects including a Parshall flume, for measuring discharge flow, and 2023 well-reclamation work were supported through this funding allocation.

Repairing and repaving the hatchery visitor center parking lot and infrastructure maintenance for the building and a historic fish railcar are taking center stage at Oden in 2024. A new domestic well for the drum screen building will improve effluent management in 2024.

In 2025, a much-needed new disinfection station will be constructed, to improve biosecurity for fish-stocking trucks coming on-site following stocking trips. The main hatchery building will get modifications to the roof and new siding that is better suited for the climate conditions of the region.

In 2026, workers will be repaving the trails, roads and entryways as well as filling cracks and sealing the asphalt around the hatchery, brood and raceway buildings. The Oden and Platte River hatcheries have similar automated fish-feeding systems that are both being upgraded with new controls and feed-delivery options using the current infrastructure for those systems.

The Oden hatchery is receiving $2.6 million to fund the work.

**Platte River State Fish Hatchery** in Benzie County produces Atlantic, Chinook and coho salmon for stocking in Michigan waters. Additionally, the Platte River facility produces walleye fry for the DNR’s walleye program.

A couple of ongoing projects were completed with this funding in 2023, including stabilizing the Lower Platte River Weir and installing new roofs on the administration, hatchery and service buildings.

In 2024, resurfacing concrete maturation ponds built in the 1960s, for holding return adult coho salmon, and replacing a backup generator and associated electrical distribution from the same era are scheduled to be completed.

For 2025, projects will include shoring up the exteriors, including doors and windows, damaged by previous poor roof conditions and age of buildings that received new roofs in 2023.

Finally in 2026, the facility will be repaved, and pavement will be added to and from the pull-through-style truck storage barn at the lower weir.

The Platte River facility will receive $6 million to finance the updates.

**Harrietta State Fish Hatchery** in Wexford County produces Atlantic salmon, brown trout and rainbow trout for stocking in Michigan waters.

A repaving for the facility was already underway and was finished using funding from the 2023 appropriation. A new backup generator, electrical distribution panels, aeration pumps with variable frequency drives, boiler and two new backup generators at production wells will bring Harrietta up to speed with new energy-efficient electrical systems in 2024.

A new truck storage building for stocking trucks, resurfacing concrete raceways and a new automated fish-feeding system will round out the projects scheduled for 2025. No new projects for the Harrietta facility are anticipated in 2026 as the repaving was completed this past year, although some repaving projects may continue into 2026.

The hatchery will receive $3.5 million to complete these projects.

**Wolf Lake State Fish Hatchery** in Van Buren County produces steelhead and Chinook salmon for stocking in Michigan waters. Wolf Lake also supports the walleye and muskellunge rearing programs.

There is a current primary power, electrical distribution project underway that is supported by the funding allocation. Redrilling two production water wells to replace two that have outrun their useful lives will greatly improve fish-rearing conditions.

Two new backup generators, electrical distribution panels, aeration pumps with variable frequency drives and two new backup generators at the new production wells will bring Wolf Lake up to date with new energy-efficient electrical systems in 2024.

For 2025, projects will include new roofs on the visitor center and hatchery buildings. A new cool-water building will be constructed, bolstering the walleye and muskellunge programs. Relining rearing ponds, resurfacing concrete raceways and indoor rearing tanks, constructing a new maintenance building and a new automated fish-feeding system will round out the projects for the year.

Finally, in 2026, the entire facility will be repaved.

The Wolf Lake hatchery will receive the most amount of funding from the state allocation at $11 million for its scheduled improvements.

At the end of the day, we will have put blood, sweat and tears into these projects and, as I said earlier, we don’t really have anything flashy or shiny to show for it yet, but results are coming.

The next three summers will be busy with construction projects moving forward at a hatchery near you.

Please excuse our mess and watch your step when you come to visit us, but take in the amazing upgrades to our fish hatcheries that will pay dividends to enhancing our fisheries for decades to come.

Learn more about the DNR’s fish hatcheries and weirs at [Michigan.gov/Hatcheries](http://www.Michigan.gov/Hatcheries).

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